Sorcerer's Apprentice

by Sam Keen

A conversation with Carlos Castaneda who learned from a Yaqui sorcerer how to stop the world when he wants to get off. The author of *The Teachings of Don Juan*, *A Separate Reality*, and the new book, *Journey to Ixtlan*, tells about flying, talking with animals, and learning to get into the sorcerer's higher state of consciousness.

Prologue

Sorcerers are not fond of statistics, verifiable knowledge or established identities. Their tradition is ancient, their knowledge is esoteric and their way of life is surpassing strange. When Carlos Castaneda began to report on the teachings of don Juan he was more than a spectator to the world of sorcery but something less than a convert. In subsequent years he found the wisdom of don Juan to be the most certain guide on "the path with heart." He is more elusive as a disciple than he was as an anthropologist. The more notoriety his books gain, the farther he retreats from public attention. His books, *The Teachings of Don Juan, A Separate Reality*, and *Journey to Ixtlan*, have sold half a million copies.

To compensate for his growing image and legend, Carlos Castaneda erases his personal history and deliberately withholds information that would destroy the anonymity he needs so that he can wander freely in whatever worlds there are or may be. When he is caught in the official world, where withholding autobiographical information is tantamount to treason, he may give his name, rank and serial number. Then, like the Lone Ranger, he disappears in a cloud of rumor.

Cool. Usually reliable sources report that Castaneda was born in Brazil 33 or 34 years ago. He spent most of his early life in Argentina before he came to the United States to study anthropology. In the summer of 1960 he set out to gather information on medicinal plants.

He met and became a friend of an old Indian—don Juan Matus—who was reputed to know something about peyote. After a year of slow-growing friendship don Juan explained that he was a *brujo* (sorcerer, medicine man, or healer) and had decided to pass along his secret knowledge to Carlos. Castaneda accepted, confident of his ability to rationalize and transcend the weird world of sorcery and keep his anthropological cool. For the next 12 years Castaneda commuted between the halls of the University of California at Los Angeles and the haunted hills of Mexico. While he played on the margins of madness he managed to retain his sanity and to work on a Ph.D. in anthropology.

Crow. More interesting than the putative facts about Castaneda are the transformations he has undergone and the marvels he has witnessed. Once he became a crow. With only a little help from the smoke of a magical plant, he watched crow's wings sprout from what had been his cheekbones and a tail grow from his neck. And then he flew off with three other crows on a three-day trip. (Anyone who has ever hunted crows would envy anyone who had a chance to crawl inside their uncanny heads. As experts in carrion—sanitation engineers—they must be able to distinguish between the living and the dead. This makes them experts in motion. Their wisdom consists in the ability to tell when things are moving too fast, too slow and just right. And that is no mean knowledge. It might serve well in our culture in which we worship a demon god called Progress who keeps us moving and changing at an insane rate.)

Coyote. And that is only the beginning. In the course of his apprenticeship Castaneda encountered creatures seldom found this side of the looking glass. When he tried to enter the separate reality of the sorcerer's world he was stopped by a gnat that was close to 100 feet tall. There were other dangers. A beautiful sorceress, la Catalina, tried to steal his soul and forced him into deadly combat. Once he almost killed her with a shotgun when she made the mistake of assuming the form of a blackbird and flying too near don Juan's house. When Carlos finally summoned sufficient nerve to ram a wild boar's hoof into la Catalina's navel she saw that his intent was strong and she ceased to bug him. Much of Carlos' power came from his meeting with Mescalito, the strawberry-headed, green-skinned spirit of peyote. But there were times when he saw unbelievable things without even a little help from his psychotropic friends. One day don Juan and his friend don Genaro made Carlos' car disappear before his stone-sober eyes. And there was the time he had a conversation with a luminous, bilingual coyote.

Consensus. All of these are but minor tricks, occasional far-out trips. The marvel of marvels was Castaneda's steady journey to the heart of ordinary reality. Things are seldom what they seem. In sharing the sources of his sorcery, don Juan sought to develop in Carlos the ability to see the everyday world with wondering eyes. Don Juan is a



Drawn by Dick Oden erased by Carlos Castaneda Aug. 14 '72

good sociologist of knowledge. He knows that the world of common-sense reality is a product of a social consensus. To marvel we need to strip ourselves of the explanations and assumptions that shape and limit our vision. If we bracket our normal ways of perceiving the world we can see how arbitrary they are. Don Juan used sorcery and psychotropic plants to help Carlos in this process of bracketing. The most sophisticated philosophers of our century have tried to accomplish the same thing by pure thought or intellection.

Condition. Here fiction and fact entwine to turn event into allegory. A student of the German phenomenologist Edmund Husserl, knowing of Castaneda's interest in phenomenology, gave him a piece of ebony that once sat on Husserl's writing desk. Carlos had read and discussed passages of Husserl's *Ideas* with don Juan and passed the gift on to him. Don Juan fondled the ebony, as Husserl had done a generation before, and gave it an honored place in his treasury of power objects that are used for conjuring. And it is wholly appropriate. Husserl sought to escape from the subjectivity and solipsism that was the legacy of Descartes' definition of man as a rational being enclosed within the certainties of his own mind. Don Juan likewise taught that it is a mistake to get caught in the world of the psyche and neglect the marvels that are all around us. There is no salvation or sanity to be found within the isolated self. If we can discover ways of deconditioning consciousness, of erasing the barriers to perception that are imposed on us by common sense, there is no telling what strange things we may discover. There are certainly more things under heaven than philosophers or psychologists or stock brokers imagine.

Change. In his most recent book, *Journey to Ixtlan*, Castaneda shows that it was more the realistic than the fantastic aspects of don Juan's teachings that convinced him that there was no other way to live an exuberant life. "Don Juan kept reminding me that I had to die," he says. When death became a reality for Castaneda he was able to change, to become more decisive, and to be less governed by the expectations of others and by ordinary social routines. He accepted the ideal of the life of the warrior who must discipline his body and accumulate personal power. By experiment with living impeccably Carlos discovered the paradoxical unity of opposites. Discipline and abandon, realism and fantasy, secondary- and primary-process thinking go hand in hand. There need be no enmity between sanity and ecstasy.

Charisma. Every age discovers or creates the heroes it needs. Ours has a strange bunch. Perhaps we feel that we are increasingly strangers in a strange land and so we populate our new world with Hobbits and gurus, charismatics and explorers of altered states of consciousness. The names of Carlos Castaneda, don Juan, Timothy Leary, John Lilly, and other psychonauts are known to many persons who think that Neil Armstrong is the all-American boy who used to be on the radio just before "Terry and the Pirates." Our occult heroes testify to the desire for a new age of enchantment. We have become disenchanted with the old dreams. We thought accumulated wealth would bring us security, and that technological power would allow us to manipulate the environment until it satisfied our every wish. We have found as much anxiety as happiness and more chaos than progress. Now it seems to be time to try another way. Neither technology nor government can change the world sufficiently to satisfy the needs of persons who understand eventually that they must die. So we revive the ancient notion of the power of personal vision. The new mysticism proclaims that enlightenment must take precedence over projects for social change. The eye of the beholder must be purified before it can see new possibilities. There is danger in enchantment. We know that the tyrannical dominion of machines, profit, and power politics will bring only increasing alienation and injustice. But it does not follow that a retreat from politics into nature mysticism or privatism will serve the cause of survival. Vision without politics is as dangerous as politics without vision. We need the disconcerting marvels of don Juan's world no less than we need the prophetic protests of the Berrigans. And we all might borrow crows' eyes and take a hard look at our rate and direction of movement. When Castaneda returned from his flight with the crows he was shaken for many days. He lived with the anxiety common to all voyagers who enter the world on the other side of the looking glass. For a time he did not know whether he was a professor pretending to be a crow or a crow pretending to be a professor. Then he laughed and knew that literal truth and poetry can never be separated. What is important is to fly high and return to earth.



Sam Keen: As I followed don Juan through your three books, I suspected, at times, that he was the creation of Carlos Castaneda. He is almost too good to be true—a wise old Indian whose knowledge of human nature is superior to almost everybody's.

Carlos Castaneda: The idea that I concocted a person like don Juan is inconceivable. He is hardly the kind of figure my European intellectual tradition would have led me to invent. The truth is much stranger. I didn't create anything. I am only a reporter. I wasn't even prepared to make the changes in my life that my association with don Juan involved.

Keen: How and where did you meet don Juan and become his apprentice?

Castaneda: I was finishing my undergraduate study at UCLA and was planning to go to graduate school in anthropology. I was interested in becoming a professor and thought I might begin in the proper way by publishing a short paper on medicinal plants. I could have cared less about finding a weirdo like don Juan. I was in a bus depot in Arizona with a high-school friend of mine. He pointed out an old Indian man to me and said he knew about peyote and medicinal plants. I put on my best airs and introduced myself to don Juan and said: "I understand you know a great deal about peyote. I am one of the experts on peyote (I had read Weston La Barre's *The Peyote Cult*) and it might be worth your while to have lunch and talk with me." Well, he just looked at me and my bravado melted. I was absolutely tongue-tied, and numb. I was usually very aggressive and verbal so it was a momentous affair to be silenced by a look. After that I began to visit him and about a year later he told me he had decided to pass on to me the knowledge of sorcery he had learned from his teacher.

Keen: Then don Juan is not an isolated phenomenon. Is there a community of sorcerers that shares a secret knowledge?

Castaneda: Certainly. I know three sorcerers and seven apprentices and there are many more. If you read the history of the Spanish conquest of Mexico, you will find that the Catholic inquisitors tried to stamp out sorcery because they considered it the work of the devil. It has been around for many hundreds of years. Most of the tech-

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niques don Juan taught me are very old.

Keen: Some of the techniques that sorcerers use are in wide use in other occult groups. Persons often use dreams to find lost articles, and they go on out-of-the-body journeys in their sleep. But when you told how don Juan and his friend don Genaro made your car disappear in broad daylight I could only scratch my head. I know that a hypnotist can create the illusion of the presence or absence of an object. Do you think you were hypnotized?

Castaneda: Perhaps, something like that. But we have to begin by realizing, as don Juan says, that there is much more to the world than we usually acknowledge. Our normal expectations about reality are created by a social consensus. We are taught how to see and understand the world. The trick of socialization is to convince us that the descriptions we agree upon define the limits of the real world. What we call reality is only one way of seeing the world, a way that is supported by a social consensus.

Keen: Then a sorcerer, like a hypnotist, creates an alternative world by building up different expectations and manipulating cues to produce a social consensus.

Castaneda: Exactly. I have come to understand sorcery in terms of Talcott Parsons' idea of glosses. A gloss is a total system of perception and language. For instance, this room is a gloss. We have lumped together a series of isolated perceptions—floor, ceiling, window, lights, rugs, etc.—to make a single totality. But we had to be taught to put the world together in this way. A child reconnoiters the world with few preconceptions until he is taught to see things in a way that corresponds to the descriptions everybody agrees on. The world is an agreement. The system of glossing seems to be somewhat like walking. We have to learn to walk, but once we learn there is only one way to walk. We have to learn to see and to talk, but once we learn we are subject to the syntax of language and the mode of perception it contains.

Keen: So sorcery, like art, teaches a new system of glossing. When, for instance, Vincent van Gogh broke with artistic tradition and painted *The Starry Night* he was in effect saying: here is a new way of looking at things. Stars are alive and they whirl around in their energy field.

Castaneda: Partly. But there is a difference. An artist usually just rearranges the old glosses that are proper to his membership. Membership consists of being an expert in the innuendoes of meaning that are contained within a culture. For instance, my primary membership like most educated Western men was in the European intellectual world. You can't break out of one membership without being introduced into another. You can only rearrange the glosses.

Keen: Was don Juan resocializing you or desocializing you? Was he teaching you a new system of meanings or only a method of stripping off the old system so that you might see the world as a wondering child?

Castaneda: Don Juan and I disagree about this. I say he was reglossing me and he says he was deglossing me. By teaching me sorcery he gave me a new set of glosses, a new language and a new way of seeing the world. Once I read a bit of the linguistic philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein to don Juan and he laughed and said: "Your friend Wittgenstein tied the noose too tight around his neck so he can't go anywhere."

"You are left with the true wonder of seeing the world without interpretation."

Keen: Wittgenstein is one of the few philosophers who would have understood don Juan. His notion that there are many different language games—science, politics, poetry, religion, metaphysics, each with its own syntax and rules—would have allowed him to understand sorcery as an alternative system of perception and meaning.

Castaneda: But don Juan thinks that what he calls seeing is apprehending the world without any interpretation; it is pure wondering perception. Sorcery is a means to this end. To break the certainty that the world is the way you have always been taught you must learn a new description of the world—sorcery—and then hold the old and the new together. Then you will see that neither description is final. At that moment you slip between the descriptions; you stop the world and see. You are left with wonder; the true wonder of seeing the world without interpretation.

Keen: Do you think it is possible to get beyond interpretation by using psychedelic drugs?

Castaneda: I don't think so. That is my quarrel with people like Timothy Leary. I think he was improvising from within his European membership and merely rearranging old glosses. I have never taken LSD, but what I gather from don Juan's teachings is that psychotropics are used to stop the flow of ordinary interpretations, to enhance the contradictions within the glosses, and to shatter certainty. But the drugs alone do not allow you to stop the world. To do that you need an alternative description of the world. That is why don Juan had to teach me sorcery.

Keen: There is an ordinary reality that we Western people are certain is *the* only world, and then there is the separate reality of the sorcerer. What are the essential differences between them?

Castaneda: In European membership the world is built largely from what the eyes report to the mind. In sorcery the total body is used as a perceptor. As Europeans we see a world out there and talk to ourselves about it. We are here and the world is there. Our eyes feed our reason and we have no direct knowledge of things. According to sorcery this burden on the eyes is unnecessary. We know with the total body.

Keen: Western man begins with the assumption that subject and object are separated. We're isolated from the world and have to cross some gap to get to it. For don Juan and the tradition of sorcery, the body is already in the world. We are united with the world, not alienated from it.

Castaneda: That's right. Sorcery has a different theory of embodiment. The problem in sorcery is to tune and trim your body to make it a good receptor. Europeans deal with their bodies as if they were objects. We fill them with alcohol, bad food, and anxiety. When something goes wrong we think germs have invaded the body from outside and so we import some medicine to cure it. The disease is not a part of us. Don Juan doesn't believe that. For him disease is a disharmony between a man and his world. The body is an awareness and it must be treated impeccably.

Keen: This sounds similar to Norman O. Brown's idea that children, schizophrenics, and those with the divine madness of the Dionysian consciousness are aware of things and of other persons as extensions of their bodies. [See "Norman O. Brown's Body," PT, August 1970.] Don Juan suggests something of the kind when he says the man of knowledge has fibers of light that connect his solar plexus to the world.

Castaneda: My conversation with the

coyote is a good illustration of the different theories of embodiment. When he came up to me I said: "Hi, little coyote. How are you doing?" And he answered back: "I am doing fine. How about you?" Now, I didn't hear these words in the normal way. But my body knew the coyote was saying something and I translated it into dialogue. As an intellectual my relation to dialogue is so profound that my body automatically translated into words the feeling that the animal was communicating with me. We always see the unknown in terms of the known.

Keen: When you are in that magical mode of consciousness in which coyotes speak and everything is fitting and luminous it seems as if the whole world is alive and that human beings are in a communion that includes animals and plants. If we dropped our arrogant assumptions that we are the only comprehending and communicating form of life we might find all kinds of things talking to us.

John Lilly talked to dolphins. Perhaps we would feel less alienated if we could believe we were not the only intelligent life.

Castaneda: We might be able to talk to any animal. For don Juan and the other sorcerers there wasn't anything unusual about my conversation with the coyote. As a matter of fact they said I should have gotten a more reliable animal for a friend. Coyotes are tricksters and are not to be trusted.

Keen: What animals make better friends?

Castaneda: Snakes make stupendous friends.

Keen: I once had a conversation with a snake. One night I dreamt there was a snake in the attic of a house where I lived when I was a child. I took a stick and tried to kill it. In the morning I told the dream to a friend and she reminded me that it was not good to kill snakes, even if they were in the attic in a dream. She suggested that the next time a snake appeared in a dream I should feed it or do something to befriend it. About an hour later I was driving my motor scooter on a little-used road and there it was waiting for me—a four-foot snake, stretched out sunning itself. I drove alongside it and it didn't move. After we had looked at each other for a while I decided I should make some gesture to let him know I repented striking his brother in my dream. I reached over and touched his tail. He coiled up and indicated that I had rushed our intimacy. So I backed off and just looked. After about five minutes he went off into the bushes.

Castaneda: You didn't pick it up?

Keen: No.

Castaneda: It was a very good friend. A man can learn to call snakes. They sense everything, your activity and your feeling. But you have to be in very good shape, calm, collected—in a friendly mood, with no doubts or pending affairs.

Keen: My snake taught me that I had always had paranoid feelings about nature. I considered animals and snakes dangerous. After my meeting I could never kill another snake and it began to be more plausible to me that we might be in some kind of living nexus.

Our ecosystem might well include communication between different forms of life.

Castaneda: Don Juan has a very interesting theory about this. Plants, like animals, always affect you. He says that if you don't apologize to plants for picking them you are likely to get sick or have an accident.

"I think don Juan turns his loneliness into art."

Keen: The American Indians had similar beliefs about animals they killed. If you don't thank an animal for giving up his life so that you may live, his spirit may cause you trouble.

Castaneda: We have a commonality with all life. Something is altered every time we deliberately injure plant life or animal life. We take life in order to live but we must be willing to give up our lives without resentment when it is our time. We are so important and take ourselves so seriously that we forget that the world is a great mystery that will teach us if we listen.

Keen: Perhaps psychotropic drugs momentarily wipe out the isolated ego and allow a mystical fusion with nature. Most cultures that have retained a sense of communion between man and nature also have made ceremonial use of psychedelic drugs. Were you using peyote when you talked with the coyote?

Castaneda: No. Nothing at all.

Keen: Was this experience more intense than similar experiences you had when don Juan gave you psychotropic plants?

Castaneda: Much more intense. Every time I took psychotropic plants I knew I had taken something and I could always question the validity of my experience. But when the coyote talked to me I had no defenses. I couldn't explain it away. I had really stopped the world and, for a short time, got completely outside my European system of glossing.

Keen: Do you think don Juan lives in this state of awareness most of the time?

Castaneda: Yes. He lives in magical time and occasionally comes into ordinary time. I live in ordinary time and occasionally dip into magical time.

Keen: Anyone who travels so far from the beaten paths of consensus must be very lonely.

Castaneda: I think so. Don Juan lives in an awesome world and he has left routine people far behind. Once when I was with don Juan and his friend don Genaro I saw the loneliness they shared and their sadness at leaving behind the trappings and points of reference of ordinary society. I think don Juan turns his loneliness into art. He contains and controls the power, the wonder and the loneliness, and turns them into art.

His art is the metaphorical way in which he lives. This is why his teachings have such a dramatic flavor and unity. He deliberately constructs his life and his manner of teaching.

Keen: For instance, when don Juan took you out into the hills to hunt animals was he consciously staging an allegory?

Castaneda: Yes. He had no interest in hunting for sport or to get meat. In the 10 years I have known him don Juan has killed only four animals to my knowledge, and these only at times when he saw that their death was a gift to him in the same way his death would one day be a gift to something. Once we caught a rabbit in a trap we had set and don Juan thought I should kill it because its time was up. I was desperate because I had the sensation that I was the rabbit. I tried to free him but couldn't open the trap. So I stomped on the trap and accidentally broke the rabbit's neck. Don Juan had been trying to teach me that I must assume responsibility for being in this marvelous world. He leaned over and whispered in my ear: "I told you this rabbit had no more time to roam in this beautiful desert." He consciously set up the metaphor to teach me about the ways of the warrior. The warrior is a man who hunts and accumulates personal power. To do this he must develop patience and will and move deliberately through the world. Don Juan used the dramatic situation of actual hunting to teach me be-

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cause he was addressing himself to my body.

Keen: In your most recent book, *Journey to Ixtlan*, you reverse the impression given in your first books that the use of psychotropic plants was the main method don Juan intended to use in teaching you about sorcery. How do you now understand the place of psychotropics in his teachings?

Castaneda: Don Juan used psychotropic plants only in the middle period of my apprenticeship because I was so stupid, sophisticated and cocky. I held on to my description of the world as if it were the only truth. Psychotropics created a gap in my system of glosses. They destroyed my dogmatic certainty. But I paid a tremendous price. When the glue that held my world together was dissolved, my body was weakened and it took months to recuperate. I was anxious and functioned at a very low level.

Keen: Does don Juan regularly use psychotropic drugs to stop the world?

Castaneda: No. He can now stop it at will. He told me that for me to try to see without the aid of psychotropic plants would be useless. But if I behaved like a warrior and assumed responsibility I would not need them; they would only weaken my body.

Keen: This must come as quite a shock to many of your admirers. You are something of a patron saint to the psychedelic revolution.

Castaneda: I do have a following and they have some strange ideas about me. I was walking to a lecture I was giving at California State, Long Beach the other day and a guy who knew me pointed me out to a girl and said: "Hey, that is Castaneda." She didn't believe him because she had the idea that I must be very mystical. A friend has collected some of the stories that circulate about me. The consensus is that I have mystical feet.

Keen: Mystical feet?

Castaneda: Yes, that I walk barefooted like Jesus and have no callouses. I am supposed to be stoned most of the time. I have also committed suicide and died in several different places.

A college class of mine almost freaked out when I began to talk about phenomenology and membership and to explore perception and socialization. They wanted to be told to relax, turn on and blow their minds. But to me understanding is important.

Keen: Rumors flourish in an information vacuum. We know something about don Juan but too little about Castaneda.

Castaneda: That is a deliberate part of the life of a warrior. To weasel in and out of different worlds you have to remain inconspicuous. The more you are known and identified, the more your freedom is curtailed. When people have definite ideas about who you are and how you will act, then you can't move. One of the earliest things don Juan taught me was that I must erase my personal history. If little by little you create a fog around yourself then you will not be taken for granted and you will have more room for change. That is the reason I avoid tape recordings when I lecture, and photographs.

Keen: Maybe we can be personal without being historical. You now minimize the importance of the psychedelic experience connected with your apprenticeship. And you don't seem to go around doing the kind of tricks you describe as the sorcerer's stock-in-trade. What are the elements of don Juan's teachings that are important for you? How have you been changed by them?

"Death is an impartial judge who will speak truth to you."

Castaneda: For me the ideas of being a warrior and a man of knowledge, with the eventual hope of being able to stop the world and see, have been most applicable. They have given me peace and confidence in my ability to control my life. At the time I met don Juan I had very little personal power. My life had been very erratic. I had come a long way from my birthplace in Brazil. Outwardly I was aggressive and cocky, but within I was indecisive and unsure of myself. I was always making excuses for myself. Don Juan once accused me of being a professional child because I was so full of self-pity. I felt like a leaf in the wind. Like most intellectuals, my back was against the wall. I had no place to go. I couldn't see any way of life that really excited me. I thought all I could do was make a mature adjustment to a life of boredom or find ever more complex forms of entertainment such as the use of psychedelics and pot and sexual adventures. All of this was exaggerated by my habit of introspection. I was always looking within and talking to myself. The inner dialogue seldom stopped. Don Juan turned my eyes outward and taught me how to see the magnificence of the world and how to accumulate personal power.

I don't think there is any other way to live if one wants to be exuberant.

Keen: He seems to have hooked you with the old philosopher's trick of holding death before your eyes. I was struck with how classical don Juan's approach was. I heard echoes of Plato's idea that a philosopher must study death before he can gain any access to the real world and of Martin Heidegger's definition of man as being-toward-death.

Castaneda: Yes, but don Juan's approach has a strange twist because it comes from the tradition in sorcery that death is a physical presence that can be felt and seen. One of the glosses in sorcery is: death stands to your left. Death is an impartial judge who will speak truth to you and give you accurate advice. After all, death is in no hurry. He will get you tomorrow or next week or in 50 years. It makes no difference to him. The moment you remember you must eventually die you are cut down to the right size.

I think I haven't made this idea vivid enough. The gloss—"death to your left"—isn't an intellectual matter in sorcery; it is a perception. When your body is properly tuned to the world and you turn your eyes to your left, you can witness an extraordinary event, the shadow-like presence of death.

Keen: In the existential tradition, discussions of responsibility usually follow discussions of death.

Castaneda: Then don Juan is a good existentialist. When there is no way of knowing whether I have one more minute of life I must live as if this is my last moment. Each act is the warrior's last battle. So everything must be done impeccably. Nothing can be left pending. This idea has been very freeing for me. I don't have any more loose ends; nothing is waiting for me. I am here talking to you and I may never return to Los Angeles. But that wouldn't matter because I took care of everything before I came.

Keen: This world of death and decisiveness is a long way from psychedelic utopias in which the vision of endless time destroys the tragic quality of choice.

Castaneda: When death stands to your left you must create your world by a series of decisions. There are no large or small decisions, only decisions that must be made now.

And there is no time for doubts or remorse. If I spend my time regretting what

How many of these people do you know?

☐ She'll break an appointment with any woman to go anywhere, anytime, with any man.

☐ He admits women have rights but feels he's doing his working wife a favor when he takes out the garbage twice a week.

☐ He believes that any woman that succeeds in business is sleeping with her boss.

☐ She says she thinks women are just as intelligent as men, but she won't go to a woman doctor or lawyer, or vote for a woman for public office.

☐ They readily accept the fact that their teenage son is sleeping around, but when their 21-year-old daughter decides to live with a man, they flip out.

☐ He believes in equal job and pay opportunities for women, but if *his* woman ever earns as much as he does, he'll make her miserable.

☐ She thinks a woman should be able to go as far in her work as her abilities will take her, but wouldn't work for a woman if her life depended on it.

☐ They buy their son a chemistry set but they get a plastic tea service for their daughter.

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I did yesterday I avoid the decisions I need to make today.

Keen: How did don Juan teach you to be decisive?

Castaneda: He spoke to my body with his acts. My old way was to leave everything pending and never to decide anything. To me decisions were ugly. It seemed unfair for a sensitive man to have to decide. One day don Juan asked me: "Do you think you and I are equals?" I was a university student and an intellectual and he was an old Indian but I condescended and said: "Of course we are equals." He said: "I don't think we are. I am a hunter and a warrior and you are a pimp. I am ready to sum up my life at any moment. Your feeble world of indecision and sadness is not equal to mine." Well, I was very insulted and would have left but we were in the middle of the wilderness. So I sat down and got trapped in my own ego involvement. I was going to wait until he decided to go home. After many hours I saw that don Juan would stay there forever if he had to. Why not? For a man with no pending business that is his power. I finally realized that this man was not like my father who would make 20 New Year's resolutions and cancel them all out. Don Juan's decisions were irrevocable as far as he was concerned. They could be canceled out only by other decisions. So I went over and touched him and he got up and we went home. The impact of that act was tremendous. It convinced me that the way of the warrior is an exuberant and powerful way to live.

Keen: It isn't the content of decision that is important so much as the act of being decisive.

Castaneda: That is what don Juan means by having a gesture. A gesture is a deliberate act which is undertaken for the power that comes from making a decision. For instance, if a warrior found a snake that was numb and cold, he might struggle to invent a way to take the snake to a warm place without being bitten. The warrior would make the gesture just for the hell of it. But he would perform it perfectly.

Keen: There seem to be many parallels between existential philosophy and don Juan's teachings. What you have said about decision and gesture suggests that don Juan, like Nietzsche or Sartre, believes that will rather than reason is the most fundamental faculty of man.

Castaneda: I think that's right. Let me speak for myself. What I want to do, and maybe I can accomplish it, is to take the control away from my reason. My mind has been in control all of my life and it would kill me rather than relinquish control. At one point in my apprenticeship I became profoundly depressed. I was overwhelmed with terror and gloom and thoughts about suicide. Then don Juan warned me this was one of reason's tricks to retain control. He said my reason was making my body feel that there was no meaning to life. Once my mind waged this last battle and lost, reason began to assume its proper place as a tool of the body.

Keen: "The heart has its reasons that reason knows nothing of" and so does the rest of the body.

Castaneda: That is the point. The body has a will of its own. Or rather, the will is the voice of the body. That is why don Juan consistently put his teachings in dramatic form. My intellect could easily dismiss his world of sorcery as nonsense. But my body was attracted to his world and his way of life. And once the body took over, a new and healthier reign was established.

"This world is the warrior's hunting ground."

Keen: Don Juan's techniques for dealing with dreams engaged me because they suggest the possibility of voluntary control of dream images. It is as though he proposes to establish a permanent, stable observatory within inner space. Tell me about don Juan's dream training.

Castaneda: The trick in dreaming is to sustain dream images long enough to look at them carefully. To gain this kind of control you need to pick one thing in advance and learn to find it in your dreams. Don Juan suggested that I use my hands as a steady point and go back and forth between them and the images. After some months I learned to find my hands and to stop the dream. I became so fascinated with the technique that I could hardly wait to go to sleep.

Keen: Is stopping the images in dreams anything like stopping the world?

Castaneda: It is similar. But there are differences. Once you are capable of finding your hands at will, you realize that it is only a technique. What you are after is control. A man of knowledge must accumulate personal power. But that is not enough to stop the world. Some abandon also is necessary. You must silence the chatter that is going on inside your mind and surrender yourself to the outside world.

Keen: Of the many techniques that don Juan taught you for stopping the world, which do you still practice?

Castaneda: My major discipline now is to disrupt my routines. I was always a very routinary person. I ate and slept on schedule. In 1965 I began to change my habits. I wrote in the quiet hours of the night and slept and ate when I felt the need. Now I have dismantled so many of my habitual ways of acting that before long I may become unpredictable and surprising to myself.

Keen: Your discipline reminds me of the Zen story of two disciples bragging about miraculous powers. One disciple claimed the founder of the sect to which he belonged could stand on one side of a river and write the name of Buddha on a piece of paper held by his assistant on the opposite shore. The second disciple replied that such a miracle was unimpressive. "My miracle," he said, "is that when I feel hungry I eat, and when I feel thirsty I drink."

Castaneda: It has been this element of engagement in the world that has kept me following the path which don Juan showed me. There is no need to transcend the world. Everything we need to know is right in front of us, if we pay attention. If you enter a state of nonordinary reality, as you do when you use psychotropic plants, it is only to draw from it what you need in order to see the miraculous character of ordinary reality. For me the way to live—the path with heart—is not introspection or mystical transcendence but presence in the world. This world is the warrior's hunting ground.

Keen: The world you and don Juan have pictured is full of magical coyotes, enchanted crows and a beautiful sorceress. It's easy to see how it could engage you. But what about the world of the modern urban person? Where is the magic there? If we could all live in the mountains we might keep wonder alive. But how is it possible when we are half a zoom from the freeway?

Castaneda: I once asked don Juan the same question. We were sitting in a cafe in Yuma and I suggested that I might be able to learn to stop the world and to see, if I could come and live in the wilderness with him. He looked out the window at the passing cars and said: "That, out there, is your world. You cannot refuse it. You are a hunter of that world." I live in Los Angeles now and I



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find I can use that world to accommodate my needs. It is a challenge to live with no set routines in a routinary world. But it can be done.

Keen: The noise level and the constant pressure of masses of people seem to destroy the silence and solitude that would be essential for stopping the world.

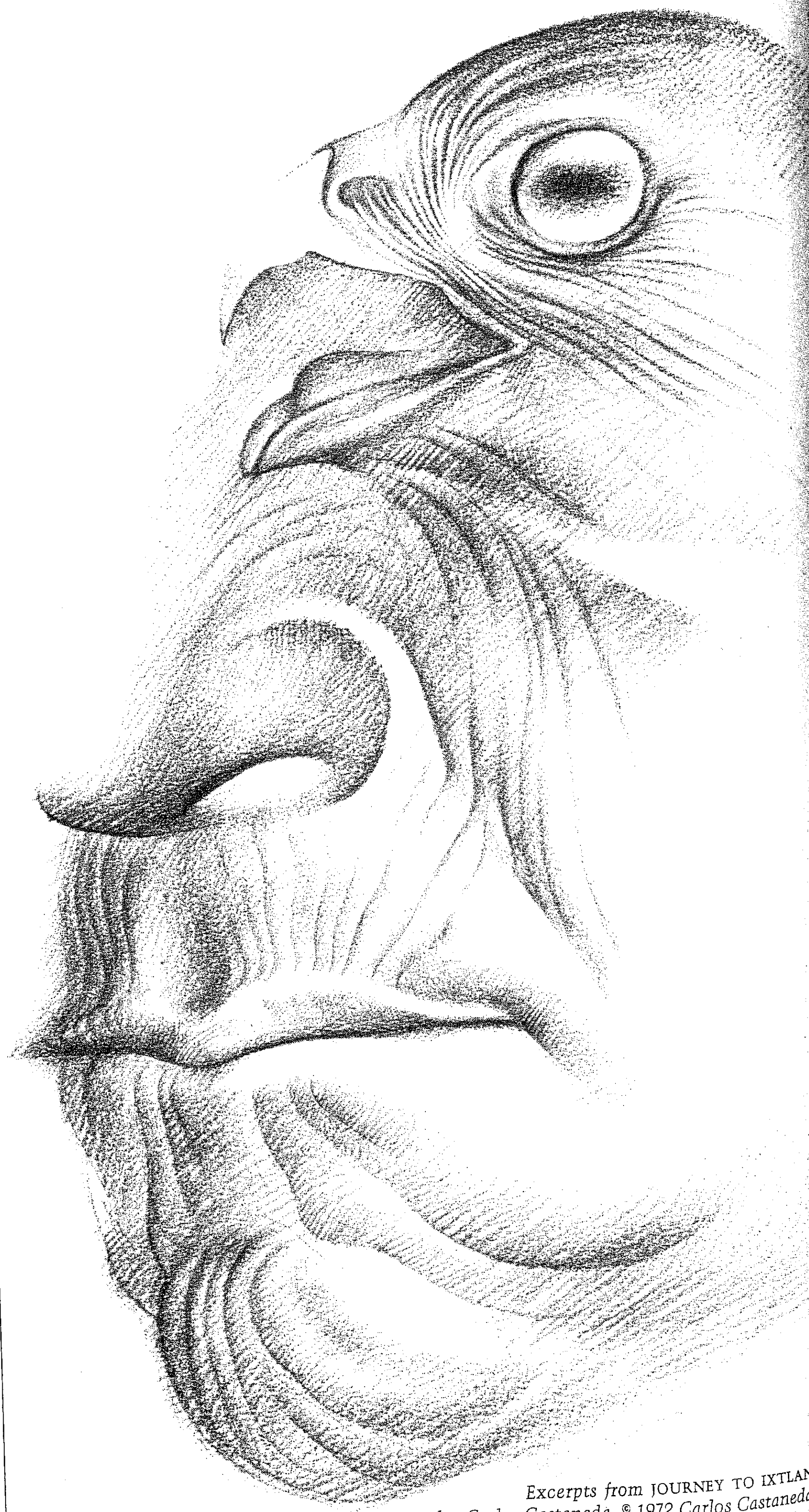
Castaneda: Not at all. In fact, the noise can be used. You can use the buzzing of the freeway to teach yourself to listen to the outside world. When we stop the world the world we stop is the one we usually maintain by our continual inner dialogue. Once you can stop the internal babble you stop maintaining your old world. The descriptions collapse. That is when personality change begins. When you concentrate on sounds you realize it is difficult for the brain to categorize all the sounds, and in a short while you stop trying. This is unlike visual perception which keeps us forming categories and thinking. It is so restful when you can turn off the talking, categorizing, and judging.

Keen: The internal world changes but what about the external one? We may revolutionize individual consciousness but still not touch the social structures that create our alienation. Is there any place for social or political reform in your thinking?

Castaneda: I came from Latin America where intellectuals were always talking about political and social revolution and where a lot of bombs were thrown. But revolution hasn't changed much. It takes little daring to bomb a building, but in order to give up cigarettes or to stop being anxious or to stop internal chattering, you have to remake yourself. This is where real reform begins.

Don Juan and I were in Tucson not long ago when they were having Earth Week. Some man was lecturing on ecology and the evils of the war in Vietnam. All the while he was smoking. Don Juan said, "I cannot imagine that he is concerned with other people's bodies when he doesn't like his own." Our first concern should be with ourselves. I can like my fellow men only when I am at my peak of vigor and am not depressed. To be in this condition I must keep my body trimmed. Any revolution must begin here in this body. I can alter my culture but only from within a body that is impeccably tuned-in to this weird world. For me, the real accomplishment is the art of being a warrior, which, as don Juan says, is the only way to balance the terror of being a man with the wonder of being a man. ■

Excerpts from **Journey to Ixtlan**
a new book by Carlos Castaneda



Excerpts from JOURNEY TO IXTLAN *by Carlos Castaneda.*

Both *Journey to Ixtlan* and *A Separate Reality* are selections of the Psychology Today Book Club.